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APPENDIX XIII.

[Vide item VII—Papers laid on the table of the House at page 115 supra.]

DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT.

COMMUNICATION TO THE COUNCIL.

With reference to the answer given to the supplementary question to question No. 73 at the meeting of the Legislative Council held on 2nd August 1933, the following reports regarding the abuse of concessions in the reserved forests of South Kanara are laid on the table of the House :—

(1) Letter from the Conservator of Forests, Ootacamund Circle, Ref. No. 119/32, dated 28th March 1932.

(2) Letter from the Chief Conservator of Forests, No. 2537/31-C-1, dated 5th August 1932.

C. A. HENDERSON,
Secretary to Government.

Letter from the Conservator of Forests, Sixth Circle, Ootacamund, to the Chief Conservator of Forests, Madras, dated 28th March 1932, Ref. No. M-119/32.

I have talked to the District Forest Officers about the 'concessions' during my present tour in South Kanara; and have also seen places where they are a serious consideration in the two divisions.

About four years ago, I wrote very fully about the concessions; past history prior to 1924; the association of panchayats with concessions, etc.; details of 'abuses' in the several reserves; our 1927 negotiations with the populace of the coast near Baindur, in search of expedients acceptable to both sides; conclusions that were reached; action taken, etc. There is nothing whatever to correct in that report of 1927; and the information on almost every aspect of the concessions is there.

I reported then that the practice in force would in time (30 years were suggested) ruin the reserves, in the same manner that the unreserves had already been ruined.

Now as regards present day opinion:—

The District Forest Officer of North division, after about two years' experience, thinks that the concessions should be withdrawn; for one reserve, then after a pause, for another, until all are closed. He would begin inland behind Baindur reserve and work outwards. He points out as an example that the Herur reserve was closed by you in 1928. An extra guard was put on (with a gun). There has been good protection and no trouble at all.

I think there is something to be said for his view. If there *are* places which really need special provision to be made, then the fact would become evident and we should have leisure in which to make arrangements. Incidentally, if we devote any area to leaf lopping, it will be inadvisable

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to cling to distinctions between classified and unclassified trees. Such distinctions are not controllable in forest which is different to a factory yard.

The District Forest Officer, South Mangalore division, also with nearly two years' experience here regards localized fellings,—confined to a fixed annual open period or periods in which we could put an extra supervision—as a workable expedient for those few places in his division that need any such provision. Elsewhere private forest and unreserves and Kumaki forests are so abundant that there is no reason for concessions.

The little private 'hadies' that one sees in North Mangalore everywhere (with masses of foliage, even now in April) are evidence how very easily any landholder can, by simply putting up a protective mud wall, grow trees and provide for his own requirements, if he likes. The ordinary cultivator (in the hands of a landlord) will prefer free supplies from reserves. The vociferous people at Baindur are landlords, incidentally, and not cultivators.

The reports of the District Forest Officers indicate that in the way of abuses and breaches of forest law, North Mangalore goes on disregarding rules as usual, whilst in the South division abuses in some places had abated considerably. In the South division I was shown one place where there were no fresh abuses, but plenty of marks of 18 months' old offences. Where there had been this improvement, it was due to personal efforts by the District Forest Officer who interviewed communities himself. But elsewhere similar efforts had failed utterly. For example in Virakhamba reserve.

Both District Forest Officers say how demoralizing it is to the subordinate staff to have unworkable rules to enforce.

The notification that is issued to the public annually runs as follows:—

" It is hereby notified for the information of the public that the Chief Conservator of Forests, Madras, in his order Ref. No. 152/29, dated 20th December 1929, has been pleased to continue the following concessions to ryots of the South Mangalore division from 1st January 1930 to 30th June 1930, in all the reserved forests of South Mangalore division. The concessions are given on the understanding that if they are abused, they will be withdrawn.

Concessions.—(*a*) Clearing of undergrowth in all reserves (except in Muliyar, Kalanjimale and Virakhamba reserve of South Mangalore division) to a distance of half a mile from the limits of private holdings;

(*b*) clearing of undergrowth in Muliyar, Kalanjimale and Virakhamba reserve of the South Mangalore division to a distance of 200 yards from the limits of private holdings;

(*c*) clearing of undergrowth in all areas sown with Hopea; and

(*d*) free removal of—

(1) green manure leaves of unclassified species and dry leaves of all species; and

(2) dead fuel.

NOTE (1).—These concessions will be limited to the use of produce in the village limits from which the produce is taken.

(2) The word 'undergrowth' noted above is defined to mean 'growth of unclassified species not above 6 feet in height' and the words 'dead fuel' to mean parts of dead trees less than 3 inches in diameter."

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(The above refers to South Mangalore division: Similar notifications are published in North division.)

Taking points in the notice:—

(*a*), (*b*) *and* (*c*)—*Clearing undergrowth.*—The idea is to do away with shelter that harbours wild pig or other enemies of field crops. I have not seen this availed of anywhere, nor have the District Forest Officers. That is to say, there are small patchy clearances of undergrowth (for example, near Mandekole village) but they were done to get leaf manure, and not to keep the wild beasts away.

Observe the foot-notes, limiting the rules:—

NOTE (1).—The produce is to be 'used'—may not be sold? or may it?—in the village limits only. Actually the destination of what is being collected is not ascertainable in the forest. Outsiders would say they were helping a local man to collect his leaf litter and we could not intervene. Outside the forest the destination of the produce cannot be interfered with or checked unless an elaborate permit system is set up. We see big boat loads of leaf being brought down the river from up country forest (origin uncertain) for sale in Coondapoor.

NOTE (2).—'Undergrowth' is limited to small stuff under 6 feet high; and 'dead fuel' is part of a dead tree and below 3 inches diameter.

But the principal catch in the rules as notified is that rule (*d*) does not impose any limitations on how 'green leaf manure' may be cut. We all know what is understood by leaf manure: it has not been picked, leaf by leaf; but consisted of lopped branches with leaves adhering.

There is nothing in the published notice limiting the height at which unclassified trees may be lopped; or the size of the branches that may be hacked off. Provided the cutting is alleged to be for leaf manure, all is well. Consequently a reserve is liable to become a dead fuel factory. The coolie hacks down a small tree or a big branch, and spreads the branches about the ground. He is 'cutting leaf manure'. In a few days, he can return; and then (gathering up the fragments) he is 'collecting dry leaves or dead fuel'.

As a matter of fact, the futility of making exact specification for such matters for the benefit of care-free coolies, boys, women and children has, no doubt, been before the eyes of whoever framed the rules. But the result is sadly evident when you inspect a reserve where these concessions are worked for all they are worth.

Take for example Sarpanamane reserve, north of Baindur and on the Bombay frontier.

Here the undergrowth is disappearing rapidly. I will quote from my inspection notes "I went precisely where I had gone in 1927. The first impression is: 'the forest looks just as it did at my last visit.' Getting further inside, however, the ground within the forest is seen to be spread about liberally with twigs and small branch material from the cutting of the smaller shrubby tree growth. Very few of the tops of the actual trees are cut. These 'trees' are 12 years old coppice regrowth from simple coppice fellings of about 1919. To the leaf manure collector they are not big enough to be worth climbing, for lopping purposes. All the cutting is, therefore, done at ground level. I saw instances of xylia poles cut evidently for roofing purposes. I came to a standstill at one point, where cutting seemed very bad, and counted round me within an arbitrary ten yards radius the stumps of small trees that had been hacked down: there were 12. I determined to go on 50 yards and count again. I did so and the count gave 11 instances."

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Technical objections to the concessions.

Removal of leaf litter.—All countries have gone through stages in which the country people have insisted on being given it: the forests have naturally deteriorated until the deterioration became evident.

The removal of undergrowth, young tree growth and shrubs is against nature and must clearly be adverse to the forest. The latter is generally deciduous, and the exposure of the soil to direct sun rays, when the leaves of the forest trees have fallen in the hot weather, causes the soil to be baked and dried up. Even the shade of leafless shrubs makes a difference. Ground vegetation affects underground water conservation. Moreover, in the monsoon, shrubs hold the soil together and as much to prevent erosion as the forest trees.

About part of Mandakole reserve in South Mangalore, I wrote as follows:—"The abuses of concession in this village neighbourhood had evidently been bad in 1930. This can be seen from the state of specially the Terminalia and Nux vomica trees. In 1931, however, the District Forest Officer had an interview with the villagers; and they promised to mend their ways. It is evident that abuses have abated greatly."

About Virakhamba reserve (South Mangalore) I wrote:—"This consists of small hilly blocks, well away from our main groups of reserves farther from the coast. The reserve is surrounded by cultivation, which uses leaf manure: Nux vomica leaves for coconut manuring: dry leaf fall litter for the paddy flats; cut leaf manure mainly Terminalia tomentosa and Nux vomica for the stable bedding, and then for general manuring purposes.

All efforts to promote a panchayat have failed, because rich man and poor man alike, each thinking for his own hand, believe they get more out of it by the present confused administration.

Past records show that lopping Terminalias for leaf manure is an old practice: offences occurred before the concessions as they occur now—ten since Christmas—but the people have now a legal footing: so they can cut more freely.

Secondly, unreserves 'out in the blue' near these blocks, do not now give as much Terminalia and Nux vomica leaf as they used to: so there is more pressure on reserves.

The Virakhamba forest is now a forest of pollards, reserved and classified trees are the main sufferers, because it happens their leaves are preferred. The local forest guard cannot keep any control. A better man would fail too.

Dry leaf is removed freely (we saw huge heaps down on the paddy flats in the enclosure village).

Fuel is stolen, to some extent."

General remarks.—The reserves most concerned with concessions are of value now for production of fuel (in fact, they are fuel coupe series), and for all the other normal functions of reserved forest.

Forest protection is seldom easy anywhere: and the state of things in South Kanara is setting up awkward precedents. I have yet to hear the train of argument that shows why South Kanara is due (sic) special free leaf manure from reserves. Yet we give it free.

The concessions are not necessary, generally. If concessions are to stop, we can easily set to work and make special plans for those particular places that must be provided with leaf manure from reserves.

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Letter from the Chief Conservator of Forests, to the Secretary to Government, Development Department, dated Ootacamund, the 5th August 1932, No. Ref. 2537/31-C-1.

[Forest concessions—South Kanara—Annual reports for the years 1930 and 1931.]

In July 1930, the Chief Conservator was instructed to report cases of abuses of the concessions permitted in the reserved forests of South Kanara where such abuse is sufficiently serious to require a reconsideration of the general orders regulating the grant of the concessions.

The working of the concessions in 1930 was reported on, but as the Conservator had not had an opportunity of himself inspecting, he was directed to offer fuller observations of his own when submitting the District Forest Officers' reports for 1931.

In North Mangalore, the position was appreciably worse in 1931 than in 1930—in no fewer than thirteen reserves were the concessions 'much' abused, and it is impossible for the subordinates to detect more than a small fraction of the abuses.

In South Mangalore the concessions are reported to have been 'much' abused in one case and 'to a fairly large extent' in nine cases. Both these definitions must be regarded as indicating a serious state of affairs as the exercise of the concessions in a regular manner inevitably results in grave damage to the forest.

The Chief Conservator has nothing to add to the views he has from time to time expressed on the subject of these concessions generally. Their exercise, whether abused or not, spells complete ruin to the forests and, although there would result some good from the removal of evergreen undergrowth in certain of the reserves in the south of the district, such an operation cannot be carried out in this way.

There is no doubt that the orders should be reconsidered in respect of the twenty-three reserves referred to though fair use of the concessions, as compared with their abuse, only implies that the forests where there is no abuse will exist for a little longer than the others.

The least law-abiding people are those north of Coondapoor and it is precisely here that the concessions are, and have always been, most abused. The District Forest Officer, North Mangalore, suggests that withdrawals should commence inland and work towards the sea, where the demand is heaviest, the unreserves destroyed completely, and the abuses the most intense. This suggestion appears a sound one and it is therefore recommended that, for the present, the concessions in North Mangalore be withdrawn in the case of the six 'much' abused reserves which lie farthest from the sea, and that the Veeracumba reserve in South Mangalore be closed to the concessions.